

Alamo Traces

New Evidence and New Conclusions

Thomas Ricks Lindley

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For
Alvy and Ethel Pullin

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Foreword

If there is such a thing as a dispassionate Alamo scholar, I've never met one. Even the soberest and tweediest of academic historians seem to have been infatuated, at an impressionable age, by the mysterious blend of annihilation and redemption that is at the core of the Alamo myth.

From time to time Thomas Ricks Lindley has tried to sell me on the idea that he is an exception to this rule, that his own interest in the subject is purely a matter of rational historical inquiry. But I know Alamo obsession when I see it. All the signs are there: the Alamo baseball cap on Tom's head, the framed photograph of the cast of John Wayne's *The Alamo* on his wall, the dog buried in the backyard whose name had been—what else?—Alamo.

But the quality that distinguishes Tom Lindley from garden-variety Alamoheads like myself, and that sometimes contentiously sets him apart from eminent historians working the same ground, is his grinding focus. I first met him about ten years ago in the Texas State Archives when I was beginning the research on my novel *The Gates of the Alamo*, and that is where he is still likely to be found today, still reading through old letters and muster rolls and military claims in musty old files that have never before been examined with such relentless scrutiny, if they have even been examined at all.

People who make their livings writing or teaching history tend to be, at least to some degree, generalists. Their goal is not just to discover facts but to interpret those facts within a broader context of thesis or theory or narrative. Tom Lindley is not a professional historian in that way, but neither is he what is sometimes condescendingly described as an “avocational” or “recreational” historian. He is a dead-serious specialist, a relentless researcher who for a decade and a half has been on the trail of one single thing: the unambiguous truth of the events of the siege and storming of the Alamo in 1836.

Lindley's training for this work comes not from university instruction in historical methodology but from his early experience in the United States Army as a criminal investigator, from which he has developed habits and attitudes that are perhaps more characteristic of the pursuit of justice than of conventional scholarship. For instance, Lindley's innate skepticism is famous in the tight little world of Alamo researchers. Historians, of course, must routinely assay the relative credibility of their research material, but Lindley has a way of raising the stakes when it comes to considering whether or not a particular document is to be trusted. He seems to retain, from his days as an investigator, a visceral understanding that any source is apt to be lying. As a result, his tireless questioning of the authenticity or veracity of certain primary documents—from John Sutherland's 1860 personal account of the first day of the Alamo siege to, most notoriously, the narrative of Mexican captain Jose Enrique de la Pena—has helped to hold Alamo research to a higher standard of credibility, even if it does occasionally annoy other historians who complain that Lindley has never met a document he likes.

His days as a criminal investigator might help to explain another quality in his work, the sense of an urgent and personal quest. Talking to Tom about his discoveries, sometimes arguing with him about his conclusions, I've often come away with the conviction that he is trying to solve not just a historical puzzle but an actual crime. In the case of the Alamo, the crime in question is what has been allowed to pass for the historical record.

In *Alamo Traces*, he attacks this record with such authority and doggedness that it is hard to imagine anyone writing about the Alamo in the future who would not have to seriously wrangle with his reassessments and reinterpretations. As Lindley himself admits, his book is not a popular history. It is, instead, a methodical, piece-by-piece dismantling of what we thought we knew, combined with convincing speculation about what might have really happened.

People will argue with some of Lindley's conclusions. No doubt there will be a howl of outrage among Sam Houston's many partisans after they have read the first chapter, in which the once

unassailable hero of the Texas revolution is indicted for what Lindley regards as his duplicitous inaction during the siege of the Alamo. And there will certainly be readers who will continue to cling to the image of Colonel William B. Travis drawing a line in the sand, despite Lindley's definitive discrediting of that beloved story. But *Alamo Traces* is the farthest thing from a revisionist manifesto. It may take on a cherished historical chestnut or two, but it does so with the intention of casting clear light rather than a dark shadow. At the same time it also offers an abundance of new information, particularly in its groundbreaking chapters on the hitherto-unknown attempts to reinforce the Alamo.

Alamo Traces is a book that must and will be reckoned with. It burrows deep into the historical record, shovels away deposits of myth and folklore and faulty assumptions that are generations deep, and never wavers in its search for a bedrock level of fact. It is a book that showcases a lifetime of fervent research and marks an audacious new direction for Alamo scholarship.

Stephen Harrigan

Acknowledgments

I owe a debt of thanks to many individuals who helped me in researching and writing this book. Foremost, *Alamo Traces: New Evidence and New Conclusions* would not have been written without the encouragement and support of former state Supreme Court justice Jack Hightower. Writer Steve Harrigan read the manuscript and offered advice on how to improve the writing and organization of the book. Steve also wrote a foreword for the work. Artist and historian Jack Jackson read some of the chapters and offered suggestions for improvement. Moreover, Jack shared some of his research on the Mexican army and drew me a map. Historian William C. "Jack" Davis also shared a number of Mexican documents he had found in researching *Three Roads to the Alamo* and furnished a back cover promotional blurb. He also read the manuscript and offered his help in locating a publisher. Historian Stephen Hardin furnished support and often acted as a sounding board for my arguments and interpretations. Dr. Jim Lutzweiler read the Moses/Louis Rose chapters and made a number of criticisms. Historian and researcher Dorcas Baumgartner, who probably knows more about Gonzales County than any other person, shared an unknown Susanna Dickinson interview with me. Lee Spence White of Freer, Texas, furnished me with names and evidence for two new Alamo defenders. Roy Timanus made some useful observations concerning the Jose Enrique de la Pena memoir manuscript. Bill Groneman allowed me the use of his research on forgery detection. Also, Bill was an important sounding board in regard to my Pena analysis. Dr. David B. Gracy II always answered my questions in regard to his point of view on the authenticity of the Pena manuscripts. Historian Jesus F. (Frank) de la Teja read an early draft of the manuscript. He made a number of important suggestions on how to improve the work. Dr. "Red" Duke of the University of Texas Medical School at Houston helped with information about wounds. Elias J. Dugie and Doyle Colwell were very generous in allowing me to use their farm and ranch land in my search for the old road bed of the Gonzales to San Antonio road. Historian Paul A. Hutton has always been supportive and interested in my research. Historian David Weber read an early draft of the Houston chapter and furnished a back cover blurb. His comments were generous, gracious, and helpful.

Then there were certain individuals employed at the various libraries and archives who helped a great deal. The Texas General Land Office operates one of three state archives in Austin. The division was well managed before David Dewhurst took over as Land Commissioner. Today, the Land Office archives are, bar none, including the University of Texas, the best archives operation in the state of Texas. Fortunately, Dewhurst had the ability to listen to the improvement ideas of his archival staff. Susan Smith-Dorsey, Carol Finney, John Molleston, Kevin Klaus, Jerry C. Drake, Bobby Santiesteban, and Galen Greaser were always friendly, professional, and knowledgeable in the assistance they gave me. Whatever the subject: land, oil, history, cartography, or genealogy, the Land Office "information specialists" can generally find the answer or point one in the right direction. John Molleston and Jerry Drake made me aware of an untapped collection of land grant applications that contained new Alamo data.

The Texas State Library also has a pretty good archives operation, second only to the Land Office. Eddie Williams, the former copy person, was extremely helpful to me. She made thousands of copies for me and I never had reason to complain. When she retired she left some big shoes to fill. Former reference archivist Michael R. Green alerted me to Alamo documents that I would never have found on my own. Donaly E. Brice and Jean Carefoot were always able to answer my questions or tell me where to look for an answer. John Anderson helped me locate the pictures I needed and took the photos of the Jose Enrique de la Pena handwriting samples.

The Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library on the Alamo grounds had a few documents that

proved useful. Alamo historian and curator Dr. Richard B. Winders has been supportive of my work. ~~Dora Guerra, Martha Utterback, and Rusty Gamez always bent over backwards to help me.~~ Dora was most helpful when she was director of the Special Collections at the University of Texas at San Antonio. She made copies of pages from the Pena manuscripts that later proved to be very helpful after the collection was broken up and sold. The late Bernice Strong was also very helpful in the last few months she worked at the DRT Library.

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The staff at Nacogdoches County Courthouse archives and the East Texas Research Center at Stephen F. Austin University in Nacogdoches helped me locate what was left of the original Louisa Rose land grant documents. Cassey Edward Greene at the Rosenberg Library at Galveston did the same in regard to a James Bowie document.

Special thanks to Brian Huberman and Cynthia Wolf for their support and inclusion in their film work. They have been good company in the long debate over the reality of the Pena memoir.

Fellow members and friends in the Alamo Society include William R. (Bill) Chemerka and Joseph Musso. Chemerka, publisher of *The Alamo Journal*, has always published my work without question. Musso, the expert on James Bowie and Bowie knives, shared research and a passion for the Alamo with me. The friendship of individuals like Chemerka, Musso, Groneman, and other members of the Alamo Society is one of the unexpected rewards of this work. A large thanks to the men and women of the Alamo Society. It is a group probably more like the men and women of the Alamo than any other Alamo organization. Just being a member of this group has been a big encouragement for me.

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In my hometown of Nixon, thanks for the support of Donald and Patricia Hoffman, Richard and Kathleen Faulkner, Nathan and Dixell Wheat, Wendle and Carolyn Scott, Don and Gladys Fincel, Calvin Ray Pullin, Billy Steubing, Phyllis Stone, Sam Nixon, Gary Davis, and historian Sylvan Dunbar. Also, Mike and Phyllis Mahan of Dermott, Arkansas.

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Many thanks to "little mom" Ethel Sears, Daryl and Fran Pullin, Larry and Cyndi Pullin, Bill and Sue Shelton, and the rest of the Deason clan for their love and support over the years. I would never have gotten here without all of you.

If I forgot anyone, please forgive me. It was not intentional. It has just been a long journey with many, many human encounters.

Introduction

Any person who takes up this book expecting a work like Lon Tinkle's *13 Days to Glory*, Walter Lord's *A Time To Stand*, Stephen L. Hardin's *Texian Iliad*, or Jeff Long's *Duel of Eagles* will be disappointed. The aforementioned histories are similar in one way. They are highly readable narrative histories. *Alamo Traces* is not a narrative history that presents the Alamo story in a manner that reads like an adventure tale. The work's concept, source material, and purpose dictated a different organizational structure.

This work critically examines selected features from the supposed body of historical truth that reports the story of the Battle of the Alamo, the most famous event in Texas history. As separate pieces, each of the subjects I have tackled would usually be submitted as an article for a scholarly journal devoted to the military history or the history of the southwestern United States. Such expression does offer the opportunity of critical acceptance by the academic community. That acceptance, however, can have a high cost. In my opinion, journal editors often place restrictions on an investigator that are very close to censorship. That is especially true when a subject goes against the grain of prevailing historical trends of the day. Therefore, because this book is different, I traveled a different road.

The book's chapters are linked together in two ways. Each chapter has, as a subject or subjects, a piece or pieces of the evidentiary puzzle that makes up the story of the Alamo. The underlying topic of each chapter is the method that the original historian, writer, or researcher used in researching and writing about the Alamo. My writing style and the book's organizational structure are aimed at one goal—clarity—so that the reader will understand the evidence, the arguments, the speculative interpretations, and the conclusions.

Some readers may see certain elements of this work as ax grinding. For example, many individuals will find the chapter on Sam Houston's role in the fall of the Alamo hard to take. Today, Houston is considered the greatest Texas hero of all time. Military historian Michael Lee Lanning, in *The Military 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Military Leaders of All Time*, rated Houston as the fifty-seventh best general of all time, ahead of such combat geniuses as Richard I (the Lion-Hearted), Robert E. Lee, Chester W. Nimitz, Bernard L. Montgomery, Erwin Rommel, and George S. Patton.

Clearly, my analysis shows that Houston would make any list of the top one hundred Machiavellian politicians of all time. Historian Jack Jackson, on reading chapter one, told me that I had "stacked the deck" against Houston by using only sources that portray him in a negative light. My answer to Jackson was: Show me some primary sources of the period that support Houston's version of events, and I will use them. I have searched for contemporary sources that speak well of Houston's behavior during the revolution, but in regard to Houston's role in the fall of the Alamo, I found no such sources. Still, I want to make it clear that my intent in writing about Houston was not malicious. In my conclusions, I feel I have only gone to those places of the past where the evidence took me.

Also, as with all the book's chapters, the falsehoods, misconceptions, and misinterpretations investigated in this study have long been entrenched in the various Alamo histories as the truth. I felt they had to be hit hard to get the evidence and my arguments across to the reader.

The work contains many long quotations that are out of fashion with historians. I presented the data in such an extended manner so that it would be almost impossible for a reader to misunderstand the evidence's context or misunderstand the information's relationship to my arguments, interpretations, and conclusions.

My training and investigative philosophy comes from my experience as a U.S. Army military policeman and criminal investigator. It might not be obvious to a professional historian, but if one

views a historian's job as a search for the truth, then a detective or criminal investigator is a historian in the truest sense. ~~Granted, crimes have generally taken place in the very recent past and the scope of the subject is limited.~~ Nevertheless, the crime investigator, like any *competent* historian, must determine the objective and unbiased truth of the "who, what, when, where, how, and why" of the criminal incident under investigation. In other words, the policeman's truth must be the one that is supported by definitive and creditable evidence because the consequences for the accused are severe. Thus, a police detective must always be concerned with the authenticity of the evidence used to build a case against a suspect. Such was the nature of the "historical truth" in the real world in which I learned my investigative skills. Does that make me a good historian? That is for others to decide.

Also, I do not take the sociological values of today and apply them to the people of Mexico, Texas, and the United States who lived in the first third of the nineteenth century, and then judge those long-dead people as morally deficient because the two sets of values are in conflict over how people should have treated each other. As best-selling author Louis L'Amour said in *Education of a Wandering Man*: "A mistake constantly made by those who should know better is to judge people of the past by our standards rather than their own. The only way men and women can be judged is against the canvas of their own time."

Thus, *Alamo Traces* is a "nuts and bolts" study aimed at readers who have a serious interest in the Battle of the Alamo and the Texas Revolution. At times, I had to speculate in order to tie certain pieces of evidence together in a way that made sense. I attempted to make such interpretations as reasonable so that they are not essentially fiction, a common characteristic of some narrative histories.

If I have learned one thing from the experience of researching and writing this book, it is a lesson that serves as a conclusion for this work. The historical Alamo must be reassembled almost from scratch. A lot of what we believe about the Texian Alamo today appears to be true, but a great deal of what is currently believed to be the truth about the event appears to be wrong. In the end, the new "truth" as I have presented it may not be totally correct (of course, it never can be) or politically correct, but perhaps the new evidence, arguments, interpretations, and conclusions in this book will bring us closer to the real thing—that is knowledge based on valid sources and reasonable interpretation.

Thomas Ricks Lindley
Nixon, Texas

Sam Houston and the Alamo: “Drawing Truthful Deductions”

No man is more completely master of the art of appropriating to himself the merit of others' good acts, and shifting on to others the odium of his bad ones, than Gen. Houston.

Dr. Anson Jones¹

In 1990 the Book-of-the-Month Club of New York issued a fine press reprint of *The Raven*, Mark Twain's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Sam Houston.² Robert M. Utley, former chief historian and assistant director of the National Park Service, wrote the introduction for the reprint. He observed

Like some great giant of fable, Sam Houston bestrode America's historical landscape for nearly half a century. In physique and character he was a giant, and on the stage of American history he played the part of a giant combining all the ingredients of gripping fiction—a dramatic, adventurous, suspenseful life and a powerful, complex, enigmatic personality—he seems more the subject for a creative novelist than a historian. . . .

Even though scholars still debate his true significance, Sam Houston has always been popularly regarded as the George Washington of Texas. As Henry Steele Commager observed in introducing an earlier edition of *The Raven*, Houston served Texas as Charlemagne, Alfred the Great, and other national builders served their realms—as inspirational folk hero as well as shaper of great events. “In a sense,” wrote Commager, “if he had not existed we should have had to create him.”³



The Imperial Sam Houston, ca. 1850

Photo courtesy Texas State Library & Archives Commission

Clearly, there is no question about Houston's personal bravery and skill as a politician and statesman. While historians, in off-handed ways, have acknowledged that Houston was not perfect, they have ignored a great deal of evidence that indicates that the Sam Houston of "giant character and military genius belongs to the realm of folklore, rather than in the evidence-driven pages of history book. Although modern Texans will find it hard to accept that Houston was not a great general, the men who fought beside him at San Jacinto did not see him as the Washington of their blood-worship republic.⁴

In early 1837 the first published attack on Houston's military role in the Texas revolution appeared in the form of an unofficial account of the San Jacinto campaign, a pamphlet titled *Houston Displayed Or, Who Won the Battle of San Jacinto? By a Farmer in the Army*. The "Farmer" was Robert M. Coleman, an aide-de-camp to Houston during the campaign, who had also participated in the Battle of Gonzales and the siege of Bexar in 1835. Coleman had been a member of the Consultation of 1835 and a signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence. After the revolution he served his country as a Texas Ranger colonel.⁵

John H. Jenkins, Texas historian and rare book dealer, described the Coleman account with these words:

The volume was issued, without doubt, as a political maneuver, but it must be remembered that Sam Houston himself seldom wrote a word that was not [political]. Scurrilous and biased as it is, there is truth to at least some of the accusations, and it was undoubtedly believed to be literal truth by scores of veterans of the campaign. Many of its accusations were substantiated by some of Texas's most highly revered heroes of that era. One finds, in fact, that a considerable majority of the officers in Houston's army were severely critical of Houston's actions in the campaign. These men sincerely

felt that his laurels were too easily won and too lightly granted by thousands of post-revolutionary immigrants who, fed by a pro-Houston press in the United States, came to Texas thinking of Houston as Texas's savior. General Edward Burleson, second in command, despised Houston till the day he died because of the campaign, as did Col. Sidney Sherman, third in command. David G. Burnet, President of Texas, was even more fanatical than Coleman in his denunciation of Houston's part. General Thomas J. Rusk, Adj. Gen. John A. Wharton, Lt. Col. J. C. Neill, Lt. Col. Mirabeau B. Lamar, Lt. Col. John Forbes, Maj. J. H. Perry, Maj. James Collinworth, Maj. Lysander Wells, Captains Turner, Moreland, Billingsley, Baker, Calder, Heard, Kuykendall, Ben Smith, Karnes, Fisher, Gillespie, and Surgeons Anson Jones and William Labadie all criticized some of Houston's actions in the campaign. Only three officers—Henry Millard, Alexander Somervell, and J. L. Bennett—appear to have unceasingly supported Houston.⁶

Texas historians and Houston biographers are familiar with the debate over Houston's command competency during the San Jacinto campaign. However, Houston's role in the rebellion previous to the 1836 retreat and the April victory, especially the Alamo, is another question. No historian has ever objectively examined Houston's activities in regard to the defense of that frontier outpost. The possibility that blame, big or small, for the fall of the Alamo can be placed on Houston's shoulders may seem implausible. Still, there is ample evidence to show that Houston was not an innocent bystander when the Alamo garrison fell to defeat. Also, the record shows that Houston was well aware of his culpability and thereafter misrepresented his Alamo-related activities to protect his reputation.

The story started on the afternoon of March 11, 1836, at about 4:00 p.m., when Houston, commander of the Texian military forces, arrived at Gonzales to take control of the troops at that location and to reinforce the Alamo. What Houston did not know at that time was that the Alamo had fallen five days earlier. When Houston finally realized that William B. Travis, David Crockett, James Bowie, and the other Alamo defenders were all dead and that the Mexican victory could seriously damage him politically, he began a campaign to separate himself from any blame for the tragic event.

Houston commenced his defensive offense a week after the Mexican victory in a missive to James Collinworth, chairman of the government's military committee. Houston wrote: "The enclosed order to Colonel Fannin will indicate to you my convictions, that, with our small, unorganized force, we cannot maintain sieges in fortresses, in the country of the enemy. Troops pent up in forts are rendered useless; nor is it possible that we can ever maintain our cause by such a policy. . . . I am informed that Colonel Fannin had about seven hundred men under his command; and, at one time, had taken up the line of march for the Alamo, but the breaking down of a wagon induced him to fall back, and abandoned the idea of marching to the relief of our last hope in Bexar. . . . The projected expedition to Matamoros, under the agency of the council has already cost us over two hundred and thirty-seven lives; and where the effects are to end, none can foresee." The spin that Houston put on the fall of the Alamo was subtle, but the message was clear. Colonel James W. Fannin Jr. was to blame for the Alamo defeat.⁸

The same day Houston dispatched a letter to Henry Raguet, a close friend at Nacogdoches. The time Houston was direct: "Colonel Fannin should have relieved our Brave men in the Alamo. He had 430 men with artillery under his command, and had taken up the line of march with a full knowledge of the situation of those in the Alamo, and owing to the breaking down of a wagon abandoned the march, returning to Goliad and left our Spartans to their fate!"⁹

On March 15 Houston reported to Collinworth: "Our forces must not be shut up in forts, where they can neither be supplied with men nor provisions. Long aware of this fact, I directed, on the 16 of January last, that the artillery should be removed, and the Alamo blown up; but it was prevented by

the expedition upon Matamoros, the author of all our misfortunes.”¹⁰

By 1859 Houston had added Alamo commander William B. Travis to his scapegoat recipe and boiled the story down to a single dish of disobedience. In a speech to the United States Senate Houston claimed his political life was at an end and declared: “How that service has been performed leave it to posterity to determine. My only desire is, that truth shall be vindicated, and that I may stand upon that foundation, so far as posterity may be concerned with my action, that they may have an opportunity of drawing truthful deductions.”¹¹

Houston then continued with a speech defending his military leadership in the revolution. Speaking to the Alamo, Houston detailed how he had ordered Lt. Colonel James C. Neill, the Alamo commander, to blow up the fortress and fall back to the Guadalupe River to establish a new defensive position.¹² He said that the enemy would advance no farther than Gonzales and continued: “That order was secretly superseded by the council; and Colonel Travis, having relieved Colonel Neill, did not blow up the Alamo, and retreat with such articles as were necessary for the defense of the country; but remained in possession from the 17th of January until the last of February, when the Alamo was invested by the force of Santa Anna. Surrounded there, and cut off from all succor, the victims to the ruthless feelings of Santa Anna, by the contrivance of the council, and in violation of the plans of the Major-General for the defense of the country.”¹³

The construction took many years, but Houston had set a solid foundation for the story he wanted historians to write. If there was to be any blame for the fall of the Alamo, his story went, it should fall on the provisional government and the victims because of insubordination by the Alamo commander Neill, Bowie, and Travis.

Today that false impression persists. In November 1993, at a rededication of Fort Sam Houston in honor of Houston’s bicentennial birthday, Madge Roberts, Houston’s great-great granddaughter, claimed that the Alamo defenders failed to follow Houston’s instructions to destroy the Alamo. She said, “He [Houston] knew that [defense of the Alamo] was a hopeless cause. He knew that the Texians could not defend the Alamo against a siege.”¹⁴

Marshall De Bruhl, author of *Sword of San Jacinto: A Life of Sam Houston*, expressed the same sentiment this way: “Travis and Bowie’s disobedience of Houston’s direct orders to abandon and then blow up the Alamo not only cost them their lives. Another 187 brave men were lost with them. But the gallant band’s defense against the superior Mexican force that besieged them for thirteen days has become America’s greatest example of military bravado. It was rash and foolish, yes, but it was grandly heroic.”¹⁵

In August 1994 De Bruhl stated his position with more precision when he complained: “There are two transcendent moments in the war for Texas independence, at Washington on the Brazos, on March 2, 1836, and the Battle of San Jacinto, at Buffalo Bayou on April 21, 1836, which guaranteed the independence. . . . It is these two events attending the birth of the republic that should be celebrated—not the bitter defeats of the Alamo and Goliad. Those baleful failures were caused by the rash acts of disobedient men and resulted in the unnecessary loss of half the manpower and much of the weaponry available to fight the invader.”¹⁶

Elizabeth Crook, in her work of fiction *Promised Lands*, wrote: “Eccentric and verbose but surefooted as a marching band, Sam Houston spoke with a drumbeat. He had told the volunteers not to go to Matamoros: those who had ignored him were now dead. He had told them to blow up the Alamo and abandon San Antonio de Bexar: those who had disobeyed were now trapped like a nest of rabbits with the hole plugged up.”¹⁷

Jeff Long, in his novel of the Texas Revolution *Empire of Bones* (promoted as historical

accurate), contributed this: “If they [Travis and Bowie] had survived their battle at the Alamo and I could ever get his hands on them, Houston thought it might be most fitting to just shoot them out of hand. Goddamn them for not blowing up their pile of mud and falling back. Bowie and the young maniac Travis had deliberately disobeyed his orders. They had stayed in their forts showboating with their own command. As a direct consequence of their hubris they had sailed off the edge of the world with some hundred and eighty men in that worthless mission corral.”¹⁸

Most recently, James L. Haley, an independent scholar and Houston apologist, wrote: “. . . so no wonder Houston sent Jim Bowie with orders to the commander there [San Antonio] to remove the artillery from the Alamo, blow the fortress up and retire to Gonzales.”¹⁹

Such is the historical record today: a resoundingly pro-Houston slant in both history and fiction that has been accepted by historians and writers without a single challenge to the tale’s veracity. There are, however, other documents that speak to the defense of the Alamo—evidence that gives objective readers the “opportunity of drawing truthful deductions” about Houston’s alleged order to destroy the Alamo and abandon Bexar. However, before an examination of the other documents is presented, a detailed analysis of the one document that seems to support Houston’s version of the events is necessary.²⁰

In mid-January 1836 Houston was in Goliad, attempting to bring the various factions of the Texian military machine together for an invasion of Matamoros. While at that location, he received a message from Lt. Colonel James C. Neill, the commander at San Antonio. Neill wrote: “There are at Laredo now 3,000 men under the command of General Ramirez [y Sesma], and two other generals, and, as it appears from a letter received here last night, 1,000 of them are destined for this place, and two thousand for Matamoros. We are in a torpid, defenseless condition, and have not and cannot get from the citizens here horses enough to send out a patrol or spy company. . . . I hope we will be reinforced in eight days, or we will be overrun by the enemy.”²¹

Neill also wrote Governor Henry Smith and the Council about the situation at San Antonio, stressing that he needed horses and men to form a spy unit to scout the area between Bexar and the Rio Grande. Neill believed the enemy was nearer to his command than the rumors indicated, and he did not want to be caught unaware of their approach.²²

The exact nature of Houston’s response to Neill’s call for help is ambiguous because we have no copy of the orders that Houston sent to Neill. A letter to Governor Smith, however, details some of Houston’s actions in response to the anticipated attack on San Antonio. This is the document that is often cited as proof that Houston ordered the Alamo destroyed and the garrison abandoned.²³ The letter reads:

Sir: I have the honor to enclose for your information a communication from Lt. Col. J. C. Neill under the date of [January] the 14th inst. Colonel Bowie will leave here in a few hours for Bexar with a detachment of from thirty to fifty men. Capt. [William H.] Patton’s [Columbia] Company, it is believed, are now there. I have ordered the fortifications in the town of Bexar to be demolished, and, *you should think well of it, I will remove all the cannon and other munitions of war to Gonzales and Copano, blow up the Alamo and abandon the place, as it will be impossible to keep up the Station with volunteers, the sooner I can be authorized the better it will be for the Country* [italics added]. In an hour I will take up the line of march for Refugio Mission with about 209 efficient men, where I will await orders from your Excellency, believing that the army should not advance with a small force upon Matamoros with the hope or belief that the Mexicans will cooperate with us. I have no confidence in them and the disaster at Tampico should teach us a lesson to be noted in future operations. I have learned that Colonel Gonzales is somewhere on the Nueces with one hundred and

seventy men, but accounts vary as to the actual number. They are to cooperate in the eastern Confederacy, I am told.

I will leave Captain [Peyton S.] Wyatt in command at this point [with his Huntsville Volunteers] until I can relieve him with thirty-five regulars now at Refugio. I pray that your Excellency will cause all the regulars now enlisted to be formed into companies, and march to headquarters [Copano]. It will be impossible to keep up a garrison with the volunteers. Do forward the regulars. Capt. [Benjamin] Fort Smith had been relieved, and I met him on his way home today. Captain Patton will return to Lavaca County and bring on a company as soon as possible. I have sent Captain [Philip] Dimmitt to raise one hundred more men and march to Bexar forthwith, if it be invested; and if not to repair headquarters with his company. Captain Patton will do likewise. I would myself have marched to Bexar but the Matamoros rage is up so high that I must see Colonel [William] Ward's men. You have no idea of the difficulties I have encountered. Patton has told me of the *men* that make the trouble. Better materials never were in ranks. The government and all its offices have been misrepresented to the army.

I pray you send me copies of Austin's letters, or rather extracts. If the Council is in session I wish they would say something about the Confederacy. Please send me frequent expresses and advise me of your pleasure.²⁴

On the surface, the January 17 letter appears to support Houston's claim that he ordered the Alamo demolished and the city abandoned because manning forts such as the Alamo was not good military policy. A careful and complete analysis of the document, however, reveals the error of such an interpretation.

The missive shows Houston did order the "fortifications in the town" destroyed, but the barricades were in the streets west of the San Antonio River. The Alamo was a separate structure and garrison on the east side of the river. In regard to the defense of the Alamo, the letter shows *Houston did not order* the fortress destroyed and the town abandoned.²⁵ Houston appealed to Governor Smith: ". . . if you should think well of it, I will remove all the cannon and other munitions of war from Gonzales and Copano, blow up the Alamo and abandon the place, as it will be impossible to keep up the Station with volunteers, the sooner I can be authorized the better it will be for the country."²⁶

Thus Houston only requested Smith's approval to demolish the Alamo and abandon the post. Also, the document shows Houston did not request authority to execute the two measures because as he later said, "Troops pent up in forts are useless," but rather he wanted to take the actions because it was impossible "to keep up the Station with volunteers."²⁷

In his 1859 Senate speech, Houston claimed his orders to blow up the Alamo and abandon the city were "superseded by the Council." In that allegation, the old general was half right. He failed to mention that Governor Smith, his political comrade and civilian superior, also ignored his recommendations regarding the evacuation of Bexar and the destruction of the Alamo.²⁸

At that point in the Texas rebellion the provisional government of Texas was in disarray, split into two political factions. Governor Smith, Houston, and the Bexar troops were in favor of independence and total separation from Mexico. Lt. Governor James W. Robinson and the General Council, with the backing of Stephen F. Austin, supported the federal constitution of 1824 and continued participation in the Mexican nation as a state. The political fray was finally resolved with the arrival of Santa Anna's army and the March 1 convention that selected independence and separation. Regardless, in mid-January 1836, the one issue on which the two political camps agreed was that the Alamo must not be destroyed and that San Antonio must not be abandoned.²⁹

On or about January 21, Governor Smith ordered Lt. Colonel William B. Travis, a Smith and

Houston supporter, to reinforce the Bexar garrison with one hundred men. Travis, however, was unable to muster about thirty soldiers for the assignment. Ironically, the unit arrived at Bexar on February 5, the date that Smith wrote: “Owing to their base management, much confusion prevailed among our volunteer troops on the frontier, but, by using much vigilance, I have now got Bexar secure.”³⁰

On January 31 the Council, having been informed of Houston’s advice to Smith, ordered that an “express be sent immediately to Bejar, with orders from the acting Governor [James W. Robinson] countermanding the orders of Genl. Houston, and that the Commandant be required to put the place in the best possible state for defense, with assurances that every possible effort is making to strengthen the supply and provision the Garrison, and in no case to abandon or surrender the place unless in the last extremity.” Truly, if there was an edict that Travis and Bowie did not obey, it was the last dictate that gave them the authority to “abandon or surrender the place” in the “last extremity”—death. Even in that situation, the commanders did not abandon the Alamo.³¹

Several questions, however, remain. On January 23, 1836, Colonel Neill notified Governor Smith: “If teams could be obtained here by any means to remove the Cannon and Public property I would immediately destroy the fortifications and abandon the place, taking the men I have under my command here, to join the Commander in chief at Copano. . . .” Historians and popular writers have offered Neill’s statement as evidence that he attempted to obey Houston’s alleged order to blow up the Alamo and abandon the city, but was prevented from doing so because of the lack of draft animals. A objective reading of the document, however, reveals that Neill did not want to leave Bexar because Houston had ordered him to do so. Neill had just received reliable intelligence that indicated Santa Anna was going to direct his forces against Goliad and Copano, not Bexar. Therefore, if the means had been available to move the cannon, Neill would have destroyed the Alamo and abandoned San Antonio in order to reinforce the troops at Goliad and Copano, not to fall back to Gonzales as Houston later claimed he had ordered.³²

Additionally, other than ordering the destruction of the fortifications west of the San Antonio River, what other orders did Houston issue in response to Neill’s letter of alarm? Houston’s January 17 letter to Smith furnishes a partial answer.

Despite nearly two hundred and forty volunteers in the Goliad-Refugio area, Houston looked to the colonies east of the Guadalupe River to reinforce San Antonio. He sent orders to Captain Philip Dimmitt, who resided on the east side of Lavaca Bay, about forty miles east of Goliad, instructing him “to raise one hundred more men and march to Bexar forthwith, if it be invested; and if not to repair headquarters with his company.”³³

Also, according to the letter, Houston believed Captain William H. Patton was already at San Antonio with his mounted infantry company. Houston informed Smith that Patton was to “return to Lavaca county and bring on a company as soon as possible.” If the enemy was not at Bexar, Patton was ordered to join Houston at Copano.³⁴

Many historians and writers insist that Houston dispatched James Bowie to the relief of Bexar with a quickly organized company of volunteers. While Bowie did hurry to San Antonio with a small volunteer company, the evidence suggests it was on his own initiative, not Houston’s order.

In writing Smith, Houston simply said, “Colonel Bowie will leave here in a few hours for Bexar with a detachment of from thirty to fifty men.” On January 30, 1836, Houston detailed events at Goliad and Refugio: “I immediately requested Colonel James Bowie to march with a detachment of volunteers to his [Lt. Colonel James C. Neill] relief.” Then on February 2 Bowie reported his version of the relief effort to Smith: “It was forthwith determined that I should go instantly to Bejar accordingly I left Genl Houston and with a few very efficient volunteers came on to this place about

weeks since. I was received by Col. Neill with great cordiality, and the men under my command entered at once into active service.”³⁵

Years later William G. Cooke, who was at Goliad in January 1836, recalled: “Bowie’s object appeared to be to induce our men to return to San Antonio—he used every means in his power to effect this object—They however at length determined to recognize the order of Genl Houston and marched to Refugio.”³⁶

The fact that Bowie and Houston were contending for the services of the same men at Goliad and the fact that Houston ordered the Alamo reinforced from the colonies suggest that the decision to support Bexar was made by Bowie and that Houston may not have truly supported the action. Thus the question remains: If Houston ordered the Alamo destroyed and the city abandoned, why did he allow Bowie to relieve the command? Also, if Houston ordered the Alamo destroyed, why did he make arrangements for other reinforcements to march to the city?

The totality of the evidence shows that Houston wanted to destroy all of the fortifications in Bexar and abandon the city. His reasons for wanting to take those actions, however, are clouded. Before the fall of the Alamo his reason for making the request to Governor Smith was that the location could not be manned with volunteers. After the tragic defeat, he alleged that he had actually issued orders for the actions because “with our small, unorganized force, we can not maintain sieges in fortresses, in the country of the enemy.”³⁷

Until Bowie and his volunteers, members of Captain John Chenoweth’s United States Invincible arrived at Bexar, the town was for the most part garrisoned by Houston’s regular army soldiers. Houston was Lt. Colonel Neill’s commanding officer. Thus, Houston had the power to order all of the city’s fortifications destroyed and the site abandoned. After all, he had made the decision to garrison the city following the fall of Bexar and the expulsion of the Mexican army in 1835. Instead, Houston “passed the buck” to Governor Henry Smith. Also, because Houston made no mention of abandoning Bexar in his January 30 report to Smith, it appears he had backed down from the proposal in the face of Smith’s order for Travis and the Legion of Cavalry to join Neill at the Alamo. In regard to San Antonio, Houston only advised Smith: “Should Bexar remain a military post, Goliad must be maintained, or the former will be cut off from all supplies arriving by sea at the port of Copano.” If Houston truly believed that the Alamo should be demolished and the city abandoned, he could have sent written orders to Neill by Bowie. Neill, an excellent soldier, would have obeyed them without question. Why did Houston fail to send such orders to Neill? Bowie, because of his strong ties to the city and its citizens, probably voiced strong objections that stopped Houston from dispatching such orders to Neill.³⁸

Houston appears to have been blind to the strategic importance of San Antonio. The town was the gateway to the Anglo-Celtic colonies of Texas. From Bexar, the Camino Real continued northeast to Nacogdoches. The road to Gonzales, Columbus, and San Felipe ran east from San Antonio to the heart of the colonies. Indeed, Bowie defined the significance: “The salvation of Texas depends in great measure in keeping Bejar out of the hands of the enemy. It serves as the frontier picquet guard and if we were in possession of Santa Anna there is no strong hold from which to repel him in his march towards the Sabine. . . . Col. Neill & myself have come to the solemn resolution that we will rather die in these ditches than give it up to the enemy. The citizens deserve our protection and the public safety demands our lives rather than to evacuate this post to the enemy.”³⁹

Travis, who did not even want to be stationed at San Antonio, once at the Alamo, came to feel the same as Bowie. On February 11 temporary command of the garrison was transferred to Travis when Neill had to return home to Mina (Bastrop) because of an illness in his family.⁴⁰ After taking command, Travis, echoing Bowie’s earlier concern about Bexar, warned Governor Smith: “This being

the Frontier Post nearest the Rio Grande, will be the first to be attacked. We are illy prepared for the reception, as we have not more than 150 men here and they in a very disorganized state—Yet we are determined to sustain it as long as there is a man left; because we consider death preferable to disgrace, which would be the result of giving up a Post which has been so dearly won, and thus opening the door for the Invaders to enter the sacred Territory of the colonies.” Again, on February 1 Travis advised Smith: “I have nothing of interest to communicate that has transpired since my last. I must, however, again remind your Excellency that this [post] is the key to Texas and should not be neglected by the Govt.”⁴¹

Marshall De Bruhl, a recent Houston biographer, argues that the Battle of the Alamo is not worth remembering today. He observed: “Texas Independence and San Jacinto Day can be celebrated with honor by all Texans, no matter what and recognize the Alamo, for what it is—a sad, heart-wrenching monument to the dead, not the storied battleground of song and legend.”⁴²

Mr. De Bruhl’s opinion notwithstanding, had the Alamo been demolished and Bexar abandoned as Houston wished, there would have been no constitutional convention to declare Texas independent and probably no conclusive Texian victory, at least not at San Jacinto. The thirteen days that Travis, Bowie, Crockett, and their men, women, and children valiantly gave Texas and the world prevented the fast moving Mexican army from sweeping deep into the Texian colonies.

On the other hand, some individuals argue that the Alamo siege gave Houston time to organize and train the army that defeated Santa Anna on April 21, 1836. Nothing could be further from the truth. At probably the most critical point in the Texas rebellion, February 1, 1836, when chaos and confusion ruled within the temporary Texas government, Houston relinquished his command over Texas military forces and went on furlough to adjust his private affairs and to smoke the peace pipe with his most loyal supporters, the friendly Indians of Texas.⁴³

On February 23, 1836, as Mexican soldiers commenced their investment of the Alamo, Houston was safely ensconced in East Texas with his Cherokee friends, signing a needless peace treaty. On March 1, 1836, Houston, with full knowledge of the situation at San Antonio, took a seat at the convention as a delegate from Refugio, a settlement he had probably only visited once in his life, and ignored his military duties so he could play a political role at the birth of an independent Texas.⁴⁴

Houston spent most of his free time at the convention in the local grog shops. Edwin Waller described delegate Houston with these words: “I found Genl. Houston drunk at the Consultation Nov[ember] 1835 and left him in the same situation in Washington [on-the-Brazos] in [18]36. He had often to be picked up and put to bed by his friends.”⁴⁵

Even Houston acknowledged his binge drinking at the Convention. Interview notes from an 1840 encounter with Mary Austin Holley quote Houston as having said: “Travis sending for assistance none to give – had to make a constitution on my birthday – had a grand spree – eggnog – everybody two days – bad business – hated it.”⁴⁶

The previously mentioned Colonel Robert M. Coleman left this description of Houston’s activities at the convention:

Thus, while Col. Travis and his gallant companions were closely besieged by an overwhelming Mexican force, with Santa Anna at its head and letters were daily received from that brave officer imploring aid, and declaring that without timely and efficient assistance he must perish. While Col. Fannin was daily calling for a force to enable him to meet the enemy in the vicinity of Goliad. While too, the citizens were abandoning their homes and fleeing to the Eastward to escape from the barbarous enemy, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of Texas was spending his nights in the grog shops of Washington, in company with the gamblers and dissipated multitude which the session of the

Convention had collected at that place; and his days were devoted to sleep, except that portion of the which he spent in vain efforts to allay the fears of the people, and to account for his disgraceful inactivity.

With this view he declared that a fraud had been practiced upon the people by the officers of the frontier, for party purposes; that there was not an enemy on our borders; that one of the officers was endeavoring to wrest from him the command of the army, for which purpose he had caused these reports to be circulated, hoping the authorities, in the event of an invasion, and absence of the Commander-in-Chief, would confer that appointment upon another.⁴⁷

One document that appears to repudiate Coleman's allegation that Houston did not believe the enemy was on the frontier is an entreaty to the public that was published under Houston's name allegedly on March 2, 1836. It reads:

War is raging on the frontiers. Bexar is besieged by two thousand of the enemy under the command of General Sesma. Reinforcements are on the march to unite with the besieging army. By the latest report, our force in Bexar was only one hundred and fifty men. The citizens of Texas must rally to aid of our army, or it will perish. Let the citizens of the east march to the combat. The enemy must be driven from our soil, or desolation will accompany their march upon us. *Independence is declared*; must be maintained. Immediate action united with valor, can alone achieve the great work. The services of all are forthwith required in the field.

Sam Houston Commander-in-Chief of the Army.

P.S. It is rumored that the enemy are on their march to Gonzales, and that they have entered the colonies. The fate of Bexar is unknown. The country must and shall be defended. The patriots of Texas are *appealed to in behalf of their bleeding country*.⁴⁸

Houston's words were the truth, but his previous actions, his subsequent behavior, and the ensuing actions of the convention suggest that if the proclamation was actually issued on March 2, 1836, it was an insincere political action to give the impression that Houston was doing something to answer Travis's call for assistance. Indeed, "the services of all" were required at the front, including the services of the "Commander-in-Chief of the Army." Other evidence indicates that the Coleman accusation is true, and that Houston was successful in convincing most of the delegates that the Alamo was not threatened.⁴⁹

On February 25 Travis wrote Houston of the conditions at the Alamo. He detailed the events that had passed since the enemy's arrival and praised his troops: "I take great pleasure in stating that both officers and men conducted themselves with firmness and bravely." Then, he closed with: "Do hasten on aid to me as rapidly as possible, as from the superior number of the enemy, it will be impossible for us to keep them out much longer. If they overpower us, we fall a sacrifice at the shrine of our country, and we hope posterity and our country will do our memory justice. Give me help, oh my Country! Victory or Death!" The missive arrived at Washington-on-the-Brazos on the evening of March 2. The impact of Travis's call for immediate aid is recorded in the diary of a spectator at the convention. It reads: "It is believed the Alamo is safe."⁵⁰

The following day the delegates, indicating they possessed a degree of skepticism about Travis's call for relief, passed the following resolution: "Believing it of vital importance that this convention know correctly the condition of our army, they would recommend the convention to accept the services of Major [Matthew] Caldwell, who purposes to start this day for the frontier." Caldwell, a Gonzales resident, had every reason (Gonzales was next in line after San Antonio) to believe that Travis's letters were the truth, even if Houston and the other delegates doubted the documents.⁵¹

The convention took no further action until the morning of Friday, March 4. Houston claimed that because of the actions of the General Council he was no longer the army's commander-in-chief. He argued that independence demanded a new appointment, as his "former oath of office was under the constitution of 1824, and in obedience thereto."⁵² To satisfy Houston, the following preamble and resolution were introduced.

Whereas we are now in a state of Revolution, and threatened by a large invading army, from the central government of Mexico; and whereas our present situation, and the emergency of the present crisis, renders it indispensably necessary that we should have an army in the field; and, whereas, it is also necessary that there should be one Supreme head or Commander in Chief, and due degrees of subordination defined, established and strictly observed, Therefore, be it Resolved, that General Samuel Houston be appointed Commander in Chief of all land forces of the Texian Army, both regulars, volunteers, and militia, while in actual service, and endowed with all the rights, privileges and powers due to a Commander in Chief in the United States of America, and that he forthwith proceed to take command, establish headquarters and organize the army accordingly.⁵³

Apparently over lunch a number of the delegates decided the government needed to ensure its control over Houston. Thus, the preamble and resolution were passed with an addition:

"And that Samuel Houston retain such command until the election of a chief magistrate of the government, and to continue in such office unless, superseded by order of the government, subject however, to the general orders of the government *de facto*, until the general organization agreeable to the constitution, and always amenable to the laws and civil authorities of this country."⁵⁴

Another resolution was introduced that specified that if Houston did not "immediately set out for the army" he should resign. Houston said that he would depart the next morning and requested that the resolution be withdrawn. The proposed mandate was dropped by its sponsor. The body then adjourned for the weekend, agreeing to meet on Monday, March 7.⁵⁵

In the late 1830s, Isaac W. Burton reported his opinion of Houston's behavior at the convention: "I thought him a man of uncommon natural abilities – But I *fancied* perhaps that his acquired ones were in a great measure superficial – I thought him in the main a man of an excellent heart but dissipated, eccentric, and vain – and on the whole I ranked him among the first men in Texas and was at that time his Political as well as warm personal friend – However, he delayed taking Command of the Volunteer Army and staid [*sic*] in the Convention employed in Legislative matters when I thought that his honor as a soldier was hourly getting dimmed."⁵⁶

On Sunday morning, March 6, Houston still had not left for the Alamo. Travis's final dispatch, however, arrived at Washington-on-the-Brazos during the delegates' breakfast and, after some hesitation, brought the issue of Houston's departure to a head. Richard Ellis, president of the convention, called the delegates together and the secretary read the letter. Many members, apparently because of Houston's influence, continued to doubt that the Alamo was under siege.⁵⁷ Forty years later, Lancelot Abbotts remembered it this way:

The veracity of the courier who carried it to Washington, and the authenticity of the signature of Travis, were questioned by some members of the Convention and by citizens. Two or three of the members were aware that I knew well the handwriting of Col. Travis, and a Committee of the Convention waited on me to ascertain my opinion on the matter. I unhesitatingly pronounced the despatch (brief as it was) to be the handwriting of the brave Travis.

A public meeting was called for the purpose of enlisting volunteers for the relief of the Alamo. At this time there was living in Washington a doctor by the name of Biggs, or Briggs, who was a bi-

burly, brave Manifest Destiny man. He made a speech, in which he declared his unbelief in the despatch, and the utter impossibility of any number of Mexicans to take the Alamo, when defended by near 200 men.⁵⁸

Finally, late that afternoon Houston left for Gonzales to take command of the forces that had mustered under the command of Lt. Colonel James C. Neill to reinforce the Alamo. Mrs. Angelina Eberly, a San Felipe resident, reported Houston's departure with these strong words: "it was Sunday collecting his besotted faculties, he [Houston] said, with much levity, to the anxious spectators, [']You must throw a shoe at me for good luck.['] No one did so – why? 'I would have had my foot in it,' she cried. It was the 6th of March – the last express came from Fannin and Travis, with a letter from the latter to Miss Cummings to whom he was engaged. They [Houston and staff] got off the same evening. That morning Travis fell!"⁵⁹

The ride to Gonzales should have taken two and a half days at the most. Instead, Houston took five days to make the trip. He spent the night of the sixth at Dr. Asa Hoxey's plantation at Colo Settlement, northwest of Washington-on-the-Brazos. On the seventh he traveled to Burnam's Crossing on the Colorado River, south of present-day La Grange. At Burnam's, William W. Thompson, an old settler, confronted Houston about his obvious delay in moving to the relief of the Alamo. Thompson described the encounter with these words: "Houston swore that he believed it [Santa Anna at the Alamo] to be a damned lie, and that all those reports from Travis & Fannin were lies, for there were no Mexican forces there and that he believed that it was only electioneering schemes [by] Travis & Fannin to sustain their own popularity[.] And Genl Houston showed no disposition of being in a hurry to the army, much to the surprise of myself & others; for he remained at Capt. Burnums all night, all that day, and all night again before he started for Gonzales. And this at a time, when anxiety for the relief of Colo. Travis & his heroic comrades, appeared to fill the minds of everybody."⁶⁰

Whereas, in 1859, Houston reported his ride to Gonzales with these words: "The Alamo was known to be in siege. Fannin was known to be embarrassed. Ward, also, and Morris and Johnson, destroyed. All seemed to bespeak calamity of the most ireful character. . . . The general proceeded on his way and met many fugitives. The day on which he left Washington, the 6th of March, the Alamo had fallen. He anticipated it; and marching to Gonzales as soon as practicable, though his health was infirm, he arrived there on the 11th of March."⁶¹ Thus, Houston did not hurry to Gonzales because he was sick and he believed the Alamo had already fallen.

Still others, besides Thompson, believed that Houston had traveled too slowly in riding to the sounds of war. San Jacinto captain Moseley Baker penned a private letter to Houston that detailed Baker's knowledge of Houston's participation in the revolution. In regard to the Alamo, Baker wrote:

While the coming of Santa Anna was . . . daily expected in the month of January, 1836, you [Houston] deliberately took your departure for Nacogdoches, on a plea of going to pacify the Indians without having previously organized a single company for the defense of the country. You remained absent, and was still so, when the Mexicans actually invaded the country and besieged the immortal Travis in the Alamo, and he in calling for assistance writes to the Convention, on account, as he himself says, "of the absence of the commander-in-chief." But sir he called in vain – you had left no organization, nothing on which the people could rally, and no one to whom to look for orders in your absence, and before the people could recover from their consternation, the Alamo had fallen, leaving [Travis] and his brave comrades shouting for Texas and her rights [paper torn] if we are to believe a contempt [torn] testimony you fell shouting [torn] your post should have [torn] [San Antonio] because it was one of danger and glory. You should have been there because the destinies of Texas were nominally resting on you. But you were in the East removed from danger, and in a condition that even

your enemies, for the honor of Texas are loath to mention.

On learning the fact that Santa Anna had actually invaded the country, you hurried to Washington to meet the Convention. You there read the appeals of Travis for assistance, but you stirred not, you remained for days waiting a reappointment, and how far you restrained yourself from your accustomed habits, let those speak who had the mortification to see you. You finally reached Gonzales, but before you did so, Travis and his Texian band had shouted their last battle cry for Texas and then slept the sleep of the Brave. Lamented Travis, so long as brave and generous deeds shall command the admiration of the free and the good – will you and your band – be immortal. Had [Ben] Milam lived or had [Edward] Burlinson commanded, you [Travis] now would be among us, but friends of my early days rest in peace. When the name of Houston shall be forgotten, yours will be repeated the more than successful rival of Leonidas.⁶²

Today one can argue that the Coleman, Thompson, and Baker statements were nothing more than political attacks on Houston. While political considerations may have produced the statements, that does not mean the declarations are false. Moreover, a document from Houston's own quill verifies an important element of the Coleman and Thompson reports.

On March 7, 1836, before Houston left for Burnam's Crossing, he wrote James Collinsworth, chairman of the government's military committee. In this missive, Houston's own words prove he was telling people he did not believe that the men, women, and children of the Alamo were under attack by the Mexican army. Also, the letter reveals that Houston, the commanding general of all Texian land forces, was oblivious to the military situation that faced the newly formed country. Houston wrote:

Before I proceed on my way this morning, you will allow me to call your attention, if you please, with that of the committee, to the subject of fortifying "Live Oak Point," on the bay of Copano. Troops coming from the U. States via New Orleans can sail for that point on armed vessels, with artillery and *lumber* sufficient for such fortifications as will be necessary for the present. The cannon there placed should be large pieces, 12 and 18 [pounders], and very few will suffice. Col. [James] Power can give you all the information that you may desire; I will only suggest that it will give you command of all supplies destined for Goliad and San Antonio, *if the enemy should even possess them* [italics added]. If a liberal appropriation of money should be made for the army, although we should not immediately receive it, it will keep down much discontent until it can be had. I pray you to have the Cherokee treaty ratified, and Major Washington Lewis, residing at Masters' on the road, appointed agent for the Cherokees to reside near Bowls'. This will be of importance to the safety of the frontier – If any plan be devised by which the Comanches can be approached by the head waters of the Brazos and they induced to fall down and range upon the Laredo route to Bexar and steal horses, it will be important. A Mr. Dillard, residing at the Falls of the Brazos will be a proper person to communicate with. Measures should be attended to if possible to prevent the Creek Indians from emigrating to the East of Texas. Col. [Thomas J.] Rusk can inform you of the fact of A. Hotchkiss' interest in inducing the Indians to emigrate to the country. The evidence is conclusive. – It would be well that the steamer packet "Wm. Brown," if purchased, should have such guns placed on her as would enable her to throw grape and canister into the enemy in close contact, as I am told she cannot carry large pieces. If Copano is occupied by us, the enemy will never advance into the Colonies. God bless you and may you long continue useful to Texas. I rode until late last night, and rose early this morning. . . .

There is a Blount in Washington, who deserves a Captaincy in the cavalry, if you should think proper to advance him. I pray that all appointments in the army, since the 6th of January, made by the self-styled "Council," may be set aside, if the persons should be afterwards appointed. – Please send Doctor [Stephen H.] Everitt, and he can speak to you of a Mr. [Stephen W.] Blount of Jasper. He only

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